CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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FINAL RECORD OF THE EIGHT HUNDRED AND THIRD PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Thursday, 13 August 1998, at 10.30 a.m.

President: Mr. Maimeskul (Ukraine)

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I declare open the 803rd plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

On my list of speakers today I have the representatives of China and Finland. I give the floor to the representative of China, Ambassador Li.

Mr. LI (China) (translated from Chinese): The Conference on Disarmament decided to establish an ad hoc committee on FMCT at its plenary on 11 August. This is an important achievement for the CD this year. Today I would like to expound on the position of China on another important agenda item, namely, the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Before touching upon that subject I would also, on behalf of the Chinese delegation, like to extend congratulations to the delegation of Brazil on Brazil's formal accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty as Ambassador Lafer reported at the first plenary of this session. We all still recall that, on 11 May this year, the same day that the CD began, a shocking nuclear test took place in South Asia. The two events are in striking contrast. Brazil, an important country, has acted responsibly to strengthen international nuclear non-proliferation and taken a major step in the right direction, helping to sustain and strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime, benefiting both regional and global peace and security, and winning general admiration and appreciation. It is our hope that other countries not yet parties to the NPT can follow Brazil's example and accede to the NPT at an early date. We also call upon the countries concerned to sign the CTBT as soon as possible, thus making their due contribution to a solid international non-proliferation regime and promoting nuclear disarmament.

Resolution 52/37, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly last year, calls upon the Conference on Disarmament to re-establish the Ad Hoc Committee on outer space and recognizes that negotiating an international agreement or agreements to prevent an arms race in outer space remains a priority task for the CD, so that outer space can be explored and exploited by all countries solely for peaceful purposes to benefit all mankind. This reflects the great importance attached by the international community to the issue of preventing an arms race in outer space. China fully subscribes to this United Nations resolution. However, people now seem to be of the opinion that there is no arms race in outer space at present and that preventing an arms race in outer space should thus not be a priority for the CD. The Chinese delegation cannot agree with this opinion. The fact is, efforts in recent years to develop and test outer space weapons and weapons systems have attracted many countries' interest. Preventing an arms race in outer space has become a present and pressing issue for the international community.

It is common knowledge that the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) in the 1980s left the whole world anxious at the prospect of space teeming with weapons. The end of the cold war has not really brought about the demise of "Star Wars", for many of the technologies have found their way into other space weapon programmes. Theatre missile defence systems, so-called TMDs, now being developed by some countries, draw on "Star Wars" concepts and military

(Mr. Li, China)

technologies. For instance, technology for space-based "extra-atmospheric lightweight kinetic projectiles" developed in the cold war is being used to develop a "Navy Area Defense System" capable of intercepting targets in outer space at an altitude of 500 km. The Theater High Altitude Area Defense System (THAAD) now under active development derives from a system used in SDI to intercept strategic ballistic missiles, and is capable of intercepting missiles not only within the atmosphere but also in outer space. A space-based infra-red system satellite which can provide tracking and guidance assistance for interceptors is still under development. Research on space-based laser weapons has been intensified. This technology is capable not only of intercepting ballistic missiles but also of attacking satellites. Last October, the country concerned conducted the first test of a high-energy chemical laser to attack satellites, causing widespread international concern. People are becoming more and more worried about the possible emergence and actual deployment of various kinds of space weapons systems, including anti-missile and anti-satellite laser weapons, in the near future.

The weapon systems under development are of various types. Some are deployed entirely in outer space or targeted at objects in outer space; some are space-based but provide target information for ground-based weapon systems. However, they all serve one purpose: They seek to procure absolute strategic military superiority and absolute security for the country concerned. There can be only one consequence: to turn outer space into a base for weapons and a battlefield. This prospect will upset regional and global strategic stability, trigger a new arms race and undermine international peace and security. The international community cannot but be deeply concerned and on its guard against this prospect.

While existing international legal instruments on outer space, such as the Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies, prohibit the deployment of weapons of mass destruction in outer space, they do not completely ban the testing, deployment and use of other weapons or weapon systems and are thus inadequate to prevent an arms race in outer space. In addition, some other treaties, such as the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, have been seriously weakened through so-called understanding or reinterpretation, creating a convenient opening for the development and even deployment of highly sophisticated space-based TMD systems.

Against this background, preventing an arms race in outer space has become a pressing issue, and the international community needs to take firm and timely action. It is precisely for this reason that the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 52/37 recognizing that negotiations for the conclusion of an international agreement or agreements to prevent an arms race in outer space remain a priority task. For years many countries including a large majority of the CD members, have been actively urging the CD to begin negotiations on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

Beginning in 1982, when the item "Prevention of an arms race in outer space" was first put on its agenda, the CD set up an ad hoc committee on the

(Mr. Li, China)

subject for 10 years in succession. Although for various reasons that Committee was unable to begin formulating international legal instruments banning the testing, deployment and use of weapons and preventing an arms race in outer space, it did hold wide-ranging discussions and consultations on matters such as definitions, standards, existing treaties and confidence-building measures, gaining experience and preparing the ground for further work now.

At the turn of the century, with space technology advancing by the day, concerted efforts by the international community are needed to ensure the peaceful use of outer space and to prevent it from becoming the site of a new arms race. Many countries put forward thoughtful views and proposals during the 10 years that the Ad Hoc Committee functioned. Some delegations also cited and analysed existing treaties, agreements and other international legal instruments relating to outer space, advancing mutual understanding among delegations and increasing the possibility of arriving at an international agreement on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in negotiations. The Chinese delegation expresses its appreciation to those delegations that made positive contributions to the work on this item. It is ready to participate constructively in deliberations on any proposals and views in this regard.

As early as 1985, China submitted to the first Ad Hoc Committee a position paper on the issue of prevention of an arms race in outer space (CD/579). In that paper it pointed out that outer space is the common heritage of mankind, that the exploration and use of outer space should serve the economic, scientific and cultural development of all countries and benefit all mankind and that China opposed any kind of arms race in outer space. China is of the view that now, when addressing this item, the Conference on Disarmament should take full account of the fact that the development, production and possible deployment of some weapons systems, including TMD, is spreading into space. Immediate action is needed to prevent the weaponization of outer space, to ban the testing, deployment and use of any weapon systems in outer space, and to prohibit the use of outer space for striking at ground targets. Countries with the most advanced space capabilities should take special responsibility for ensuring that space is used for peaceful purposes only and commit themselves not to test, deploy or use any weapon system or components in outer space pending the conclusion of a multilateral agreement on the prevention of an arms race in outer space.

The Chinese delegation would suggest and encourage the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research to conduct useful research on the production and development of outer space weapons. At the same time we welcome the experts from CD member States who have come to brief the Conference on this subject.

The Special Coordinator on this item, the Ambassador of Sri Lanka, stated in his progress report at the plenary on 11 June that CD members had not expressed an objection to the re-establishment of an ad hoc committee, but that further consultation was needed over the date. It is our hope that all CD members can display the political will and flexibility necessary to enable

(Mr. Li, China)

the relevant consultations to yield quick and positive results, allowing the CD to begin substantive work on the effective prevention of an arms race in outer space as early as possible and not fall short of the international community's expectations.

Mr. REIMAA (Finland): Finland welcomes the important decision of the Conference on Disarmament on 11 August 1998 to start negotiations on a non-discriminatory, multilateral and internationally and effectively verifiable treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices.

In this connection I would especially like to thank you, Mr. Maimeskul, for this achievement. The diplomatic and professional manner in which you have conducted the consultations made the smooth decision possible.

Following the decision of the Conference, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Mrs. Tarja Halonen, gave the following statement in Helsinki on 11 August:

> "I am truly pleased that the Geneva Conference on Disarmament has today decided to commence negotiations on an international treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons. In the aftermath of the nuclear-test explosions conducted by India and Pakistan in May, it is of particular importance that international arms control dialogue is moving forward. The beginning of the negotiations represents a significant step in support of nuclear disarmament as well as in the strengthening of the nuclear non-proliferation regime.
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> "This decision commits all five nuclear-weapon States, as well as so-called threshold States, to the negotiations and the objective of ending the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons.
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> "As a member of the Geneva Conference on Disarmament, Finland will participate actively in the negotiations."

The FMCT negotiations will deal with several issues which are either politically or technically very complex. It is the view of our delegation that no time should be wasted in starting to engage in concrete work. In view of the short period left in this session, we should also make the most effective use of the period between the CD sessions. We hope that the flexibility which enabled the Conference to reach the decision on Tuesday on the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee would remain with us and facilitate our future work.

Mr. RIVASSEAU (France) (translated from French): Two days ago, the Conference took an important decision by setting up an ad hoc committee under item 1 of our agenda to negotiate what most of us usually call the "cut-off" treaty. My delegation keenly hopes that this committee will begin work as soon as possible, in view of the amount of time that has passed in this last part of our annual session.

(Mr. Rivasseau, France)

My delegation is aware of the intensive consultations which you have been holding with the regional groups to secure a rapid agreement on the appointment of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee, and we are very grateful to you. My delegation understands that agreement is close, even if we are not able to take a decision today. In this context, Mr. President, and in view of the urgency of the matter, my delegation proposes that, if you consider the circumstances appropriate, you should hold a special plenary meeting, tomorrow if possible, or at least early next week, to make it possible to appoint the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee so that this Committee can meet as early as next week.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): I thank the representative of France for his statement. I was going to address that very matter, but I have taken note of his proposal.

Do any other delegations wish to take the floor at this stage? I see none. As you know, intensive consultations are continuing with regard to the appointment of the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for the manufacture of nuclear weapons or other explosive devices which we established at the plenary meeting last Tuesday. It will be for my successor in this post, Ambassador Ian Soutar of the United Kingdom, to complete these consultations and to inform the Conference of the results of his efforts.

I would now like to make a few closing comments.

(continued in English)

As this is the last plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament under the presidency of Ukraine, I am pleased to state that this period of time was one of intensive work, productive initiatives and mutual cooperation which, at the end, have led the Conference to the adoption of the landmark decision on the establishment under agenda item 1 of the Ad Hoc Committee to negotiate a treaty on the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices on the basis of the Shannon report (CD/1299) and the mandate contained therein. By doing so, the Conference on Disarmament has shown its collective wisdom and determination to make one more decisive breakthrough in the field of both nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. It is now a matter of hope that during its twentieth jubilee annual session in 1999, progress in the negotiations will allow us to say that, on the eve of the twenty-first century, the CD is acting vigorously in promoting the realization of a nuclear-weapon-free world, an idea which we all share.

From any perspective, it is evident that achieving such a ban will constitute a major event in both nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament. Therefore, the task before the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee appears to be enormous as well as of the utmost responsibility.

The adoption of the decision on the establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear

(The President)

weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, followed by the Presidential statement, stems from the consultations on agenda item 1 conducted by the "troika" in pursuance of decision CD/1501. At the end of the second part of the session, my predecessor, Ambassador Sungar of Turkey, submitted a progress report on these consultations. At the very beginning of the third part of the session, I resumed these consultations on agenda item 1. Thus, on 28 July, the "troika" started the bilateral consultations with various CD delegations, including the P-5 countries. These were concluded on 31 July.

In the course of the bilateral consultations, the presidency heard the views of delegations belonging to different regional groups. These views, in my opinion, can be summarized as follows:

The Group of 21 continues to attach the highest priority to nuclear disarmament multilateral negotiations within the CD, and stressed the need for the immediate establishment of an ad hoc committee on nuclear disarmament, on the basis of the proposals made in this regard by the Group and its members.

Many delegations, including those from the Western Group, expressed their support for the idea of establishing a consultative, advisory mechanism within the CD to provide the Conference with more information about the achievements and the complex issues involved in the nuclear arms reduction process, although the very concept of such a mechanism still needs more detailed elaboration.

Delegations of some nuclear-weapon States emphasized that their preference was the establishment of an ad hoc committee to negotiate the prohibition of the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices. Delegations of other nuclear-weapon States indicated their preference to return back to other aspects of agenda item 1 during the next annual session, especially if START-II enters into force.

A number of proposals on agenda item 1 are still on the table of the Conference and deserve further consideration.

In view of the fact that, during my presidency, I was almost entirely involved in promoting the decision on the establishment of the Ad Hoc Committee on the prohibition of the production of fissile material, the "troika" has not convened the open-ended consultations focusing on other aspects of agenda item 1. I hope that my successor in this function, Ambassador Soutar of the United Kingdom, will continue intensively the "troika" consultations, which should be more fruitful and productive against the background of the recently adopted decision on an ad hoc committee to negotiate a ban on the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, and the Presidential statement that followed it.

This concludes my observations on the issues pertaining to agenda item 1.

(The President)

I should like to express my satisfaction that the Conference is now fully engaged in its substantive work. The Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on negative security assurances conducted a set of fruitful meetings and will start soon the drafting of his report to the Conference. The six Special Coordinators are in the process of further consultations pursuant to their respective mandates. Under my presidency the Special Coordinators on APLs, on transparency in armaments and on expansion of CD membership have presented their progress reports to the Conference. It is my hope that the Conference will take, before the end of this session, concrete steps based on their findings.

I should like to express my best wishes to the incoming President of the CD, Ambassador Ian Soutar of the United Kingdom. I look forward to continuing our joint task under his presidency. I wish also to thank him as well as Ambassador Murat Sungar of Turkey for their valuable contribution to our endeavours and for their constant support.

I should also like to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General of the Conference on Disarmament, Mr. Petrovsky, the Deputy Secretary-General, Mr. Bensmail and Mr. Zaleski, as well as to all the secretariat staff and the interpreters for their tireless efforts to provide the necessary services to ensure the smooth functioning of the Conference.

I especially felt how valuable and highly professional was the assistance provided by Mr. Petrovsky, Mr. Bensmail and Mr. Zaleski when the situation in the CD during the last few days compelled the President to react and decide immediately and, at the same time, in a moderate way with a view to preserving the essence of what was achieved by all delegations together. I thank all the delegations to the Conference on Disarmament for their active cooperation with, and support to, the President.

(continued in French)

The secretariat has just distributed to you, at my request, a revised tentative timetable of meetings of the Conference and its subsidiary bodies for next week. That timetable was drawn up in consultation with the incoming President of the Conference, the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on security assurances and the Special Coordinators, and as usual it is only indicative and may be changed if necessary. That being understood, I suggest that we adopt it.

It was so decided.

The PRESIDENT (translated from French): We have come to the end of our agenda and I intend to adjourn this plenary meeting. The next plenary meeting of the Conference will take place on Thursday, 20 August at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 11 a.m.